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**'Love at first sight, at last sight,  
at ever and ever sight':  
Scrutinizing Lolita's Body**

**Abstract:** This article examines some of the more disquieting strains in Nabokov's *Lolita*. It argues that the novel's field of vision is structured in a way that links Humbert's gaze with his filmic and photographic imagination. More general reflections on the nature of cinematography and photography lead to a reconsideration of *Lolita*'s premature death as a literalization of the more sinister implications of Humbert's artistic aspirations. Humbert's modernist quest for knowledge is shown to coincide with a cinematic and photographic discourse that engulfs *Lolita* in a semantic web of death. It will be argued that Lyne's recent cinematic adaptation of the novel lacks precisely in its omission of these morbid undertones.

In her seminal essay on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1989), Laura Mulvey discusses the role of scopophilia in mainstream Hollywood cinema. Mulvey defines scopophilia as the "pleasure in looking at another person as an erotic object" (25) and locates it in both the male spectator and the male fictional character, with whom the spectator may identify. Female characters are the "raw material for the (active) gaze of man" (25) and thus connote "to-be-looked-at-ness" (19). They remain the passive objects of the male gaze.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Film theorists familiar with Mulvey will be bemused by Barbara Freedman's (1991) more recent work on the gaze and her assertion that "[w]hereas Western narrative cinema is obsessed with the look, Western theater is fascinated by the return of that look, what psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan terms "the gaze" (1). The seemingly conceptual differences between Mulvey and Freedman are mainly due to a terminological inexactitude on Mulvey's part. Although Mulvey repeatedly stresses the "psychoanalytic background" (25) of her essay and makes use of the Lacanian concept of the mirror phase (cf. Mulvey: 1989, 17ff.), her notion of the gaze must not be confused with the Lacanian interpretation Freedman uses. In Lacan, the gaze is not located in the male subject, it is in fact not located in the subject at all. Central to Lacan's theory of the gaze is his assertion that "we are beings who are being looked at, in the spectacle of the world. That which makes us consciousness institutes us by the same token as *speculum mundi*" (Lacan: 1987, 75). The gaze comes from the outside, from the world of things: "on the side of things, there is the gaze, that is to say, things look at me" (109). The gaze is therefore outside the subject: "in the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture" (106). Craig Saper (1991) analyzes as the central failure of psychoanalytic media studies that "the gaze remains attached to a point of view" (36). In the entry for 'gaze' in his *Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian psychoanalysis* (1996), Dylan Evans concludes: "Much of so-called 'Lacanian film theory' is [...] the site of great conceptual confusion" (73). In discussing Humbert's gaze in the light of Mulvey's theories, I will presuppose a commonplace usage of 'gaze' as 'steady or intent look' (OED) and not the Lacanian notion, which clearly dissociates the gaze from the eye and from the look.

The most obvious links between Mulvey's theories and Nabokov's *Lolita* are the novel's constant references to film and photography. But let me first focus on what I believe is a more fundamental aspect. An analysis of narrative strategies will enable us to bring Nabokov's *Lolita* into a dialogue with both Mulvey's thoughts on the gaze and Adrian Lyne's recent adaptation of the novel to the screen.

Nabokov creates in Humbert a character who is cultured, witty, eloquent, sophisticated, funny, and at times even a little sentimental. Moreover, Humbert's double function as fictional character and first-person narrator allows him to present his point of view, which ensures that *Lolita* is decisively Humbert's and not *Lolita*'s story and thus works towards the reader's identification with him. Nabokov's choice of a first-person narrator helps to draw the reader into what Wayne C. Booth calls *Lolita*'s "vicious center of consciousness" (1961, 390). Nabokov thus sets in motion processes of identification that establish a prose equivalent of what Mulvey diagnoses as scopophilia in narrative cinema.

Running counter to these identificatory processes, however, is a profoundly disturbing tone that is more in tune with the themes of child abuse, murder, and pedophilia. In order to keep what Nomi Tamir-Ghez calls "the desired delicate balance between the reader's feelings of identification with and rejection of Humbert" (1984, 162), Nabokov resorts to two fundamental textual strategies.<sup>2</sup>

On the one hand, there are several straightforward indications of Humbert's depravity scattered throughout the text. The appeal of Humbert's brilliant rhetoric is considerably impaired when we learn that he pays *Lolita* a "weekly allowance [...] under condition she fulfill her basic obligations" (183), when we read that he threatens her with "the correctional school, the reformatory, the juvenile detention home" (151), or when we catch a glimpse of Humbert taking advantage of *Lolita*'s desolation after her mother's death: "At the hotel we had separate rooms, but in the middle of the night she came sobbing into mine, and we made it up very gently. You see, she had absolutely nowhere else to go" (142). As a first-person narrator, Humbert could have easily omitted these incriminating passages, but he preserves them, he claims, "for the sake of retrospective verisimilitude" (71).

Nabokov's second strategy is more subtle and cannot always be attributed to a conscious decision on the narrator's part. Humbert's narrative is impregnated with a rhetoric of violence that consistently undermines his self-styled image as a slightly unconventional but essentially well-meaning scholar and father. In his role as narrator, Humbert himself evokes the possibility of a hidden undercurrent:

It is just possible that had I gone to a strong hypnotist he might have extracted from me and arrayed in a logical pattern certain chance memories that I have threaded through my book with considerably more ostentation than they present themselves with to my mind even now when I know what to seek in the past. (255)

Freudian parody aside, Humbert's deliberations refer to potential subconscious threads informing his narrative. But Humbert's speculations also reflect on the process of

<sup>2</sup> In what I consider one of the best articles written on *Lolita* to date, Tamir-Ghez traces Humbert's rhetoric of persuasion and its ultimate dismantlement from a narratological point of view.

fiction-making and thus point to the highest authorial instance, to Nabokov. This essay argues that Nabokov's novel thematizes the more sinister implications of Humbert's scrutinizing gaze in a way that defies any univocal reading of *Lolita* as a comic novel and thus works against the reader's identification with a murderer, pedophile, and abusive stepfather.

Nabokov's choice of a first-person narrator clearly assigns the subject and object roles: Humbert is the speaking 'I', Lolita the third-person object of his discourse. The gendered distribution of roles also structures the field of vision. *Lolita* is narrated with internal focalization, which means that the narrator relates only what the character perceives (Genette: 1980, 189ff.).<sup>3</sup> It is through Humbert's senses of hearing, feeling, tasting, smelling and seeing that the reader experiences the world of *Lolita*. Humbert's visual impressions figure prominently in the narrative, which comes as no surprise given that his voyeuristic obsession with nymphets derives mainly from his fascination with their juvenile bodies, their "dim eyes, bright lips" (20), their "slightly feline outline of a cheekbone, the slenderness of a downy limb" (17), their "slim bare arms" (20). Humbert lives in an "oculate paradise" (163) and he is quite literally 'all eyes':

There my beauty lay down on her stomach, showing me, showing the thousand eyes wide open in my eyed blood her slightly raised shoulder blades, and the bloom along the incurvation of her spine, and the swellings of her tense narrow nates clothed in black, and the seaside of her schoolgirl thighs. (42)

To *Lolita*, Humbert realizes late in the novel, he is "not a boy friend, not a glamour man, not a pal, not even a person at all, but just two eyes and a foot of engorged brawn – to mention only mentionable matters" (283).

When Humbert's "glance slither[s] over the kneeling child" (39), when he "lower[s] [his] gaze" and lets it "slid[e] along the underside of her tensely stretched bare thigh" (204), when he observes "the wet glistening down of her armpit" (163), Lolita is constantly and thoroughly examined by Humbert's searching eyes. So when Humbert confesses towards the end of the novel that, with Lolita, "[i]t was love at first sight, at last sight, at ever and ever sight" (270), he provides a fitting epitaph on their exploitative relationship.

It is therefore also appropriate that Humbert's otherwise ubiquitous gaze is absent from the passage which is by many critics regarded as proof of what John Ray calls Humbert's eventual "moral apotheosis" (4).<sup>4</sup> Soon after Lolita's disappearance, Humbert witnesses the sounds of children at play and in an epiphanic moment realizes that "the hopelessly poignant thing was not Lolita's absence from my side, but the absence of her voice from that concord" (308). Humbert hears the children's voices but cannot see them as it is "really too far for the eye to distinguish any movement in the lightly etched streets" (308). Humbert's voyeuristic gaze would have certainly interfered with his feelings of empathy and it is only in the absence of his gaze that Humbert may reach a dim understanding of the pain he has inflicted on Lolita.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Genette: 1980, 189ff. Some of *Lolita*'s metafictional elements modify and exceed this pattern. An obvious example would be Nabokov smuggling his own name into the narrative with the anagram "Vivian Darkbloom" (31).

<sup>4</sup> See Bergholtz for a summary of critical views that affirm "Humbert's [moral] conversion" (234).

It is here that we can already catch a glimpse of a fundamental difference between Nabokov's novel and Lyne's adaptation. Lyne chooses this scene as the last but one and ends his movie with a shot of Lolita in full bloom, lying seductively on a bed. It is of course true that Humbert feels remorse as he hears the children, but by choosing to end his movie with those two scenes, Lyne unquestioningly adopts Humbert's version of the story, which emphasizes his feelings of repentance while at the same time insisting that "it was she who seduced me" (132). Nabokov's novel is infinitely more subtle in its skillful manipulation of the reader's response to Humbert's thoughts and actions and constantly manages to undermine (rather than ratify) Humbert's protestations of good-naturedness.

According to Mulvey, the gaze is one of the defining features of narrative cinema. It is in this respect that the constant presence of Humbert's gaze links up with *Lolita*'s ubiquitous allusions to the movies. Alfred Appel, editor of *The Annotated Lolita*, has in fact devoted a whole book to Nabokov's cinematic imagination: *Nabokov's Dark Cinema* (1974). Lolita is an "avid reader of movie magazines" (49), her favorites being "*Movie Love* or *Screen Land*" (148). Her mother Charlotte disparagingly comments on Lolita's penchant for the world of cinema in the following terms, "[y]ou see, she sees herself as a starlet; I see her as a sturdy, healthy, but decidedly homely kid" (65). After Charlotte's death, Lolita lets others believe that her mother "was a celebrated actress killed in an airplane crash" (189), and Humbert thinks he knows (and Lyne's version takes this for granted) that if he kissed her, she would "even close her eyes as Hollywood teaches" (48). Alfred Appel concludes that "Humbert's dream incarnate is of course Lolita; hers is Hollywood" (1974, 88). It is therefore no coincidence that Lolita runs away with the pornographer Clare Quilty, who promises that

he would take her [...] to Hollywood and arrange a tryout for her, a bit part in the tennis-match scene of a movie based on a play of his – *Golden Guts* – and perhaps even have her double one of its sensational starlets on the Klieg-struck tennis court. (278)

Humbert is no pornographer, but in one of the many passages which indicate that Clare Quilty is actually Humbert's alter ego, his *doppelgänger*, Humbert intends to preserve Lolita's tennis play on celluloid as he imagines "Dolores acting a girl champion in a movie" (232).<sup>5</sup> Looking back on the days when he used to admire her tennis play, Humbert regretfully calls to mind missed opportunities: "That I could have had all her strokes, all her enchantments, immortalized in segments of celluloid, makes me moan today with frustration" (232). At first sight, Humbert's wish to immortalize Lolita would seem to be a beneficent act recalling the old topos of immortality through art. Alfred Appel argues in a similarly optimistic way: "[Quilty's] sexuality, dissociated from love and naked in every way, degrades its objects, while the artist's obsession, transformed by love and humanized by language, rescues its subject" (118). I would, however, wish to assert that Humbert's skillful manipulation of language only creates an illusion of humanity while surrounding its object with a discourse of death. Humbert's penetrating gaze parallels the pornographer's as it reduces Lolita to an object. It is therefore in perfect

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the *doppelgänger* motif, see Appel, *The Annotated Lolita*, lx-lxviii and 349 n. 31/9.

keeping with Lyne's strategy of exonerating Humbert that he effaces the *doppelgänger* theme informing the Humbert-Quilty relationship by portraying the former as an essentially well-meaning scholar with slightly unconventional desires and the latter as a ruthless, evil monster. Moreover, contrary to Lyne's adaptation, the novel also thematizes Humbert's attempt to freeze Lolita into an image which is entirely at his disposal: "Idiot, triple idiot! I could have filmed her! I would have had her now with me, before my eyes, in the projection room of my pain and despair!" (231; my italics).

Mulvey notes that film is an intrinsically voyeuristic medium because of the separation between the viewer and the people on the screen, which are – like the object of the voyeur's gaze – perfectly indifferent to and unaware of the other's searching eyes (1989, 17). A realization of Humbert's project would therefore allow him to continue his voyeuristic habits in Lolita's absence with perfect impunity and even greater indifference to the states of mind of his object of representation.

Adrian Lyne's cinematic adaptation of the novel at least partially realizes Humbert's project, but it does so for the spectator rather than for Humbert. As Louis Giannetti points out, a strict translation of first-person prose narration into film is problematic because it means that "the camera would have to record all the action through the eyes of the character, which, in effect, would also make the viewer the protagonist" (1988, 350). Such a continuous succession of point-of-view shots is ultimately ineffective and frustrating, if only because the spectator "wants to see the hero" (359).<sup>6</sup> First-person narration in the strict sense is therefore relegated to few experimental films, and Lyne's *Lolita* is no exception. Lyne's camera switches back and forth between objective treatment, where the spectator is an observer who may watch Humbert watching, and point-of-view shots, where the spectator's gaze merges with Humbert's. Because the camera constantly reminds the reader of Humbert's presence (in the objective treatment), the spectator is invited to distance him- or herself from Humbert's voyeurism while at the same time being able to participate in it (in the point-of-view shots). Watching Lyne's movie, the spectator can have it both ways: s/he is allowed to adopt the voyeuristic stance but is always also given the opportunity to distance him- or herself from Humbert and put the blame at his feet.

This is particularly striking in a scene which is not part of the novel and has been inserted by Lyne. Shortly after Lolita learns of her mother's death, we see her lying on a bed with a built-in electronic massage device. Lolita turns it on while Humbert is taking a shower in the adjacent bathroom. The spectator is left alone with Lolita rolling around on the bed and is forced into a voyeuristic stance that is not mediated by Humbert's gaze. This scene is clearly designed for the (male) spectator's enjoyment, who is invited to usurp Humbert's role in his absence. Lolita never gazes back at the camera and thus leaves the spectator in the perfectly unchallenged and unobserved role of the voyeur.

In contrast to Lyne's invitation to adopt Humbert's viewpoint, Nabokov's novel undermines the reader's identification with Humbert by linking Humbert's discourse to an epistemophilic project with decidedly sinister undertones. Humbert's desire to

<sup>6</sup> This seemingly banal desire on the part of the spectator touches on the fundamental question of processes of identification (Ross: 1987, 8).

immortalize Lolita represents a miniature version of his avowed "greater endeavour [...] to fix once for all the perilous magic of nymphets" (135). His wish to arrest the magic of nymphets represents an impossibility because, as Peter Brooks points out, "our technologies of representation, including descriptive prose, always bear witness to that impossible enterprise of arresting and fixing the object of inspection" (1991, 60). There are two avenues of escape available to the artist faced with this dilemma. In a move which Brooks situates in the transition from realism to modernism, the artist may question "the very epistemophilic project," whereupon "the very principle of knowing [...] another body comes to appear hopeless" (60).<sup>7</sup> Nabokov's *Lolita* documents the ultimate failure of Humbert's epistemophilic project and Humbert's reminiscences of Lolita betray a dim knowledge of the impasse: "If I close my eyes I see but an immobilized fraction of her, a cinematographic still" (44). Similarly, as Humbert later reflects on his representational failures, a certain awareness of the problem at hand shines through: "The beastly and beautiful merged at one point [...] it is that borderline I would like to fix, and I feel I fail to do so utterly. Why?" (135). But this knowledge does not detract Humbert from his ultimate goal. He wants to know Lolita's body inside out and thus chooses the second avenue, in an extreme form of which "the body must be killed before it can be represented" (Brooks: 1991, 60). In a crucial passage – which Lyne, not surprisingly, fails to reproduce – the morbid apex of Humbert's desire to completely know the fixed object of his gaze comes to the fore as he yearns to apply "voracious lips to [Lolita's] young matrix, her *unknown* heart, her nacreous liver, the sea-grapes of her lungs, her comely twin kidneys" (165; my italics). His apparently selfless wish that "this memoir" is "to be published only when Lolita is no longer alive" (309) thus assumes an uncanny quality not only in the framework of the confessional novel – which is characterized by the heroine's absence from the narrative<sup>8</sup> – but also because a desire for total knowledge and finality is inscribed by death. As D.H. Lawrence puts it, "to know a living thing is to kill it" (1923, 70).

Humbert's obsession with every detail of Lolita's body is directly linked with his gaze through a semantic convergence of seeing and knowing. "Sight," Peter Brooks points out, "is conceived to be the most objective and objectivizing of the senses, that which best allows an inspection of reality that produces truth. 'I see', in our common usage, is equivalent to 'I know' – *voir* is *savoir*" (1991, 54). Humbert's quest for knowledge therefore also informs his anticipation of a cinematic (hence visual) adaptation of the novel, a project which was realized by Stanley Kubrick in 1962 and Adrian Lyne in 1997. On a visit to the Wace post office (another of Lyne's glaring omissions), Lolita's eyes scan the rogues' gallery as Humbert addresses the reader, "If you want to make a movie out of my book, have one of these faces gently melt into my own, while I look" (222). Next to the pictures of criminals, there is a "smudgy snapshot of a Missing girl, age fourteen" (222). The photograph forebodes Lolita's

<sup>7</sup> Brooks's remarks recall Brian McHale's differentiation between modernist preoccupations and post-modernist ones as a "shift of dominance from epistemology to ontology" (8).

<sup>8</sup> In her discussion of Prévost d'Exile's confessional novel *Histoire du Chevalier des Grioux et de Manon Lescaut*, Naomi Segal focuses on the symptomatic absence of women from the confessional narrative: "the woman on whom the whole text depends is dead or at least very much out of the way, and the man has lived specifically to tell the tale" (xiii).

disappearance from the post office while Humbert is perusing one of her letters: "I looked up from the letter and was about to – There was no Lo to behold. [...] It had happened at last. She had gone for ever" (223). More relevant to my discussion, Nabokov's evocation of a missing girl also points to Lolita's absence in Humbert's narrative: she is replaced by an imaginary creation which has more in common with a "photographic image rippling upon a screen" (62) than with a flesh-and-blood human being.<sup>9</sup> Humbert therefore chooses a befitting occupation for Lolita in one of his poems: "Profession: none, or 'starlet'" (255).

Lolita's own fascination with Hollywood cinema does not fail to reproduce some of the more sinister overtones of Humbert's cinematic imagination. After pulling Lolita out of Beardsley School and untruthfully promising its headmistress that Lolita will be back "as soon as [his] Hollywood engagement came to an end" (208), Humbert embarks with Lolita on their second cross-country trek. Back on the road, Lolita is anxious to get to Elphinstone and "climb Red Rock from which a mature screen star had recently jumped to her death after a drunken row with her gigolo" (210). Again, Lyne's cinematic version omits the novel's sinister reverberations by having Lolita refer to Red Rock without any mention of the deadly incident.

Mulvey's discussion of the male gaze in cinema and her insistence on the "sexual objectification" (1989, 20) of female characters applies to Humbert's relationship with Lolita. Throughout both the prose and the film version, Lolita is the (often unknowing) object of Humbert's scopophilic pursuits. When he settles down by the swimming pool to "watch her gambol, rubber-capped, bepearled, smoothly tanned, as glad as an ad, in her trim-fitted satin pants and shirred bra," his remarks disclose the possessive aspect of his gaze: "How smugly would I marvel that she was mine, mine, mine" (161). A similar tone prevails as Humbert imagines Lolita sitting at the school desk: "And there she is, lost in the middle, gnawing a pencil, detested by teachers, all the boys' eyes on her hair and neck, *my Lolita*" (53). It therefore comes as a great blow to his self-esteem that Lolita, who, Humbert admits, "was ready to turn away" from everything he has to offer her "with something akin to plain repulsion" (166) rejoices in Quilty's gaze: "And I also knew that the child, my child, knew he was looking, enjoyed the lechery of his look and was putting on a show of gambol and glee, the vile and beloved slut" (237). Humbert becomes physically sick as he realizes this: "I started to say something, and then sat down on the grass with a quite monstrous pain in my chest and vomited a torrent of browns and greens that I had never remembered eating" (238).

Nabokov's Humbert always knows that Lolita does not love him. In order to ensure her availability as an object of desire, he therefore drugs her in anticipation of their first night. At the Enchanted Hunters hotel, he feeds Lolita sleeping pills, hoping that "by nine, when *his* show began, she would be dead in his arms" (116). Alluding to the first masturbation scene, Humbert insists that he is "still firmly resolved to pursue [his] policy of sparing her purity by operating only in the stealth of night, only upon a completely

<sup>9</sup> Lolita's absence from the narrative is further ensured by John Ray, the professed moralist and fictive editor of *Lolita*. In "Framing *Lolita*: Is There a Woman in the Text?" (1989), Linda Kauffman rightly asserts that Ray focuses entirely on Humbert's part of the story and shows "an utter disregard for Lolita's suffering" (142). Ray "effaces her entirely" (142) and therefore assumes complicity in assuring Lolita's absence from the narrative.

anesthetized little nude" (124). Humbert's anxiety about Lolita's purity may well be sincere, for a little girl's innocence provides part of the thrill for the nympholept. But his ensuing remarks disclose that the real reason why he wants her drugged is of a different nature. Rendering her unconscious with the sleeping pills allows Humbert to possess her in a way he would not believe possible with a fully conscious Lolita: "And she was mine, she was mine, the key was in my fist, my fist was in my pocket, she was mine" (125), Humbert rejoices minutes before entering room 342, where he expects to find Lolita "spread-eagled on the bed where my philter had felled her" (125).

In his discussion of a very similar passage in Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, Peter Brooks comments on the implications of the main protagonist's wish to possess a woman's unconscious body. The relevant excerpt in Proust contains the narrator's admission that he sometimes reached orgasm by lying close to the sleeping body of Albertine. Brooks translates the passage as follows: "It seemed to me in these moments that I had possessed her more completely, like something unconscious and without resistance in mute nature" (trans. in Brooks: 1991, 61). The narrator's discourse turns Albertine into a thing, an inanimate object ("something unconscious," "mute nature"). Brooks states that "[i]t is thus only in reduction of the woman's body to unconsciousness, in making it part of the natural world, that Marcel is able to feel fully in possession of her" (61). We are reminded of Humbert's afterthoughts on the first masturbation scene: "What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation [...] having no will, no consciousness – indeed, no life of her own" (62). When Humbert finally enters room 342, where he finds Lolita lying on the bed, the atmosphere is appropriately sinister: "The door of the lighted bathroom stood ajar; in addition to that, a skeleton glow came through the Venetian blind from the outside arclights" (128). While the hotel corridor is a "[p]arody of silence and death" (119), Humbert is "morbidly sensitive" (129) as his "tentacles move[...] towards her" (130) and he manages "to bring [his] ravenous bulk so close to her" that he feels "the aura of her bare shoulder like a warm breath upon [his] cheek" (130). The scene, Alfred Appel points out, parodies the horror movie genre: "Humbert frequently employs horror-film effects which would be blatant or ridiculous on any screen" (139) and thus feeds the reader's imagination with dark premonitions.

When Humbert realizes that the sleeping pills did not have the intended effect of rendering Lolita completely unconscious, he makes a revealing resolution: "Tomorrow I would stuff her with those earlier pills that had so completely numbed her mummy" (129). Humbert is prepared to go all the way and risk reducing Lolita to the ultimate stasis of death. The pun on "mummy" is obvious (and Charlotte Haze *is* dead) and refers forward to the portentous "mummy of a child" (157) Humbert and Lolita will encounter during one of their cross-country travels. To Humbert's great surprise, it is Lolita, who finally initiates sexual intercourse: "Frigid gentlewomen of the jury! [...] I am going to tell you something very strange: it was she who seduced me" (132). Whether we believe him or not (Humbert is a notoriously unreliable narrator) and whatever happened during that first night (we are not told in detail), it must have had a devastating effect on the twelve-year-old child, for, back in the car the next day, Humbert feels as if he were "sitting with the small ghost of somebody I had just killed" (140).

While Lyne's filmic version does reproduce this sentence and thus indicates Humbert's feelings of remorse, it fails to reproduce both Humbert's drugging of Lolita

with all its sinister implications and Nabokov's evocation of the horror movie genre. The latter omission is particularly glaring because it would have been a perfect opportunity for Lyne to capture both the parodic nature of Nabokov's work and the novel's cinematic imagination. Instead, Lyne accompanies the scene with romantic music (written by Ennio Morricone) and manages to turn what was originally a sinister scene into a Hollywood-style love encounter.<sup>10</sup>

While Lyne's version downplays the often eerie tone of Humbert's rhetoric, Nabokov's novel continues in a decidedly ominous vein. As Humbert later describes his library search for a photographic proof of his own presence at the Enchanted Hunters hotel, the imagery he uses is of an appropriately morbid nature:

A twittering spinster was only too glad to help me disinter mid-August 1947 from the bound *Briceland Gazette*, and presently, in a secluded nook under a naked light, I was turning the enormous and fragile pages of a coffin-black volume almost as big as *Lolita*. (261f.)

Scanning the *Briceland Gazette*, Humbert wonders about his urge to detect "the portrait of the artist as a younger brute" (262), i.e. a photograph of himself:

I cannot well explain the true nature of that urge of mine. It was allied, I suppose, to that swooning curiosity which impels one to examine with a magnifying glass bleak little figures – still life practically, and everybody about to throw up – at an early morning execution, and the patient's expression impossible to make out in the print. (262)

Humbert here compresses two images into one. He not only alludes to children's sadistic fascination with killing ants ("bleak little figures") by setting them on fire with the help of the sun's rays and a magnifying glass, but he also refers to the reading public's fascination with printed images of corpses or people close to death ("at an early morning execution"). In the context of the second image, Humbert's reference to the art form of the still life calls to mind Roland Barthes's assertion in *Camera Lucida* (1981) that the photograph is a kind of *tableau vivant*, "a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead" (32). Humbert's description of how he remembers *Lolita* bears witness to a certain awareness of the existing affinity between photography and death:

There are two kinds of visual memory: one when you skillfully recreate an image in the laboratory of your mind, with your eyes open [...] and the other when you instantly evoke, with shut eyes, on the dark innerside of your eyelids, the objective, absolutely optical replica of a beloved face, a little ghost in natural colors (and this is how I see *Lolita*). (11)

This passage not only testifies to Humbert's blindness to the 'real' *Lolita's* suffering ("with shut eyes"), but it also spells out the consequences of reducing her to a fixed photographic image as she is turned into "a little ghost in natural colors."

<sup>10</sup> The soundtrack of Lyne's *Lolita* is of an almost exclusively romantic nature, its individual tracks bearing evocative titles such as "Togetherness," "Love in the Morning," "Take Me to Bed," "I'm in the Mood for Love," and "Amor."

Both film and photography attempt to arrest life into an immutable image. But there are obvious differences between the two media. As René Clair pointed out as early as 1924, one of the defining features of film, as opposed to photography, is movement: "If there is an aesthetics of the cinema [...] it can be summarized in one word: 'movement'" (qtd. in Kracauer: 1992, 103). It is this quality of film which leads Anne Hollander to speak of the 'endlessness' of the medium:

Even if the movie camera sits on a motionless subject, the film is still moving and we are still waiting, expectant and responding, our eyes and spirits in motion. Movies that end with fade-outs on continuing action, or more recently with freeze-frames, show how endlessness is at the core of the medium. (Hollander: 1989, 26)

Adrian Lyne clearly exploits this aspect of the medium by adding one last shot after the credits. The spectator, who has already been informed about Humbert's and *Lolita's* deaths, perceives *Lolita* throwing a ball up in the air, catching it and throwing again, keeping it in movement as the screen fades to black. With his emphasis on the continuation of the story, Lyne ends the film on a positive note, affirming Humbert's wish to "make [*Lolita*] live in the minds of later generations" (309). Had Lyne tried to capture the more sinister undertones of the novel, the screening of a photograph of *Lolita* would have been the more appropriate ending. Photography, with its static nature and affinity to death, would have been an apt medium to express that, in the end, *Lolita's* death "in childbed, giving birth to a stillborn girl" (4) is merely a literalization of Humbert's artistic imagination.

It is for this reason that we should be prepared to disagree when Nabokov's Humbert includes himself in an imagined community of artists in order to vindicate his crimes: "Emphatically, no killers are we. Poets never kill" (88).

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## Buchbesprechungen

**Burkhard Dretzke. Modern British and American English Pronunciation: A Basic Textbook.** Uni-Taschenbücher 2053. Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich: Schöningh, 1998. 247 pp. Pb. DM 36,80. ISBN 3-8252-2053-2.

Die Reihe der Einführungen in die englische Phonetik und Phonologie nimmt kein Ende. Jedoch zeichnet sich die vorliegende gegenüber anderen dadurch aus, daß sie (1) neben der *Received Pronunciation* (RP) des Britischen Englisch auch die von ihr abweichenden Lautungen des *General American English* (GenAmE) berücksichtigt sowie (2) primär praktisch ausgerichtet und besonders im segmentalen Bereich kontrastiv angelegt ist. So wird hier systematisch auf die für Deutschsprachige typischen Aussprachefehler und -schwierigkeiten hingewiesen und enthält das Buch auch generelle Aussagen zu den Themenkomplexen "Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis" sowie "Learning, Teaching and Testing Pronunciation". Außerdem folgt der Beschreibung des Gegenstands noch ein Übungsteil und sind in die Darstellung Fragen und Aufgaben eingebaut, mit einem Schlüssel zu ihrer Lösung am Ende jedes Kapitels, wo sich überdies weiterführende Literaturhinweise und Ausspracheangaben zu den verwendeten Fachtermini sowie zu schwierigen Wörtern oder Namen finden.

Der deskriptive Teil des Buches beginnt mit einer allgemeinen Einführung in die Phonetik und Phonologie, speziell in deren artikulatorische Basis, und wendet sich dann im 2. Kapitel gleich der Beschreibung der englischen Vokale und Konsonanten zu. Sie erfolgt sehr genau und detailliert und enthält gelegentlich auch Hinweise auf die

Distribution der Phoneme (vgl. 55f.) sowie Ratschläge zur Erlernung ihrer richtigen Aussprache (vgl. z.B. 56, 65 oder 68).

Das 3. Kapitel ist der Wort- und Satzbetonung, dem Rhythmus und der Intonation gewidmet und findet seine Fortsetzung im 4. Kapitel, in dem Erscheinungen der zusammenhängenden Rede wie die Schwachtonformen der Funktionswörter sowie die Assimilation, die Elision und die Bindung behandelt werden. Zuwenig Beachtung wird der Verwendung des Nebentons geschenkt, der auch in den Ausspracheangaben fast durchweg nicht verzeichnet wird. Außerdem hätte bezüglich der Kriterien für die Bestimmung der Wortbetonung (75) noch auf die Unterscheidung zwischen germanischen und nichtgermanischen Lexemen bzw. Suffixen hingewiesen werden sollen. In bezug auf den Rhythmus und die Intonation vermißt man in Kapitel 3 den Vergleich mit dem Deutschen und dem GenAmE (doch siehe zu letzterem Kap. 8.2.4./5.).

Erst in Kapitel 5 statt gleich in der Einführung wird näher auf den Begriff des Phonems und auf die Möglichkeiten seiner Definition eingegangen, speziell auf seine Analyse als Bündel von distinktiven Merkmalen. Hinsichtlich dieser hätte für die Unterscheidung von Konsonantenphonemen wie /p/ und /b/ oder /s/ und /z/ anstelle der Stimmbeteiligung (119) besser die Artikulationsstärke gewählt werden sollen, da die Stimmhaftigkeit ja weitgehend von der Stellung abhängig ist (vgl. 27).

Kapitel 6 und 7 befassen sich mit der Transkription der Laute bzw. mit dem Verhältnis von Schreibung und Aussprache. Leider wird in bezug auf letzteres nicht klar zwischen Schreib- und Ausspracheregeln sowie regelmäßigen und unregelmäßigen



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ker hat die Problematik der Verortung  
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gebracht wie dieser "anglisierte post-  
koloniale Migrant, der zufällig ein Lite-  
raturwissenschaftler mit leicht franzö-  
sischem Einfluß ist" – so Bhabhas  
Selbstcharakterisierung. In einer virtu-  
osen, beziehungsreichen Sprache legt  
er dar, daß in postkolonialen Zeiten das  
"Wesen" oder der "Ort" der Kultur nicht  
mehr als einheitlich, geschlossen  
verstanden werden kann. Derartigen  
Vorstellungen hält der Theoretiker der  
Hybridität sein Konzept des "Dritten  
Raumes" entgegen, das über die geläu-  
figen Polaritäten wie Ich – Anderer, Drit-  
te Welt – Erste Welt weit hinausgeht.  
Die in der *Verortung der Kultur* versam-  
melten Texte zählen zu den innovativ-  
sten und einflußreichsten Arbeiten der  
aktuellen Literaturtheorie und Kultur-  
wissenschaft. Eine ernstzunehmende  
Beschäftigung mit postkolonialen oder  
multikulturellen Fragen ist – wie Toni  
Morrison einmal sagte – ohne eine  
Lektüre von Homi K. Bhabhas Werk  
schlicht undenkbar.

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